Claire Connolly

Natural History and the History of Nature: Environmental Narratives in Irish Romanticism

"Of what history is the history of natural history in Ireland a part?" (Outram 461). The question suggests the difficulties encountered when we seek to frame Ireland's environment as an object of scholarly inquiry. In spite of the many ways in which "land has long been central to articulations of Irish identity" (Wright ix), Ireland's unsettled past means that its natural history is known only via dissonant and broken narratives. These "great difficulties in conceptualizing" Irish land, allied to negative associations between scientific endeavour and colonial history, may well "have laid the grounds of the comparative indifference towards ecological issues that many recent commentators have discerned in Ireland" (Outram 469).

Though it is difficult to determine the current state of environmental consciousness in Ireland, we can observe in literary studies a lack of considered engagement with the particularities of territory or the specific meanings of landscape; all the more notable given the centrality of land in definitions of Irish Romanticism.[1] In Irish Studies, we are familiar with thinking about place as expressed in complex, often metaphoric, relationship to patterns of dispossession and resettlement but unaccustomed to conceiving of natural history on its own terms. What would it mean to think about coasts, bogs, rivers, lakes and woodlands as densely layered sites with their own histories, as resonant places whose meanings are not exhausted by their deployment as cultural or political metaphors, and as environments whose imperiled state demands our care? In narrative terms, how are specific sites realized in the literature of Irish Romanticism? To borrow from Caroline Levine's conceptualisation of form in terms of overlapping affordances: "what happens when just two or three forms meet: when national boundaries meet narrative closure" (113) or, we might ask, when the specificities of geographical space meet the arc of narrative form? What meanings do particular places afford once inscribed in literature?

We are currently witnessing a rich moment in humanities scholarship, whereby the new lens provided by environmental history has opened up alternative ways of seeing Irish and other cultures. The concept of the anthropocene identifies a new age: a geological era defined by significant human impact on the earth. As Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it, an anthropogenic approach means "the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history" (201). Subsequent scholars have built on these insights to move postcolonial scholarship in the direction of an enhanced environmental awareness. In a consideration of "what we can learn from read-

1 Andrew Carpenter and Lucy Collins are a notable exception: they ask us to attend to the inscriptions of the natural world in Irish literature in terms of "complex interweavings of political realities and aesthetic possibilities" (11).

ing [Edward] Said in a warming world", Naomi Klein writes of the "original Faustian pact of the industrial age: that the heaviest risks would be outsourced, offloaded, onto the other – the periphery abroad and inside our own nations" (n. pag.). If historical change involves the history of nature as well as the more familiar forms of social and political history, there is a need to pay closer attention to ways of representing change outside familiar political and social narratives of union and revolution that structure our understanding of Irish Romanticism. Can we conceive of land "less as a place and more as a spatial and temporal event", as Eric Gidal has recently argued for Scottish Romanticism? (14).

My argument offers an approach that functions on three scales: first, a consideration of the critical territory of nineteenth-century Irish literature; second, a closer consideration of the south west coast of Ireland; and, finally, a detailed reading of a poem by James Clarence Mangan, "Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey at Teach Molaga", published in *The Nation* newspaper in 1846. The combined method might be thought of as expressing and inhabiting the different scalar levels at which we encounter climate change: as a broad global pattern on the one hand, and as a series of small, intimate actions and encounters on the other. Additionally, because "anthropogenic climate change is ongoing rather than eventual or unilinear" (Pinkus 4), we tend to approach it at different times as well as on different scales: as Karen Pinkus puts it, writing about climate change criticism, "our time is increasingly characterized by brief periods that allow us to write (in denial), punctuated by extreme weather, violent disruptions, panic. And yet, we do write and we do think, with all the critical acumen we can muster" (4). In such a critical model, the relationship between past and present is crucial and my conclusion returns to the present moment.

Gillen D'Arcy Wood's environmental history *Tambora* (2013) offers a compelling discussion of the cultural consequences of the eruption of the Indonesian volcano in 1817, leading to dark skies and unseasonably cold weather across Europe and the eastern Atlantic seaboard: the so-called "year without a summer" (Wood). The best known cultural consequence of this weather system is the storm over Lake Geneva that "ignited the literary imaginations" of Mary Shelley, Lord Byron and John Polidori and led to the first telling of the supernatural tales that later constituted *Frankenstein* and *The Vampyr* (Wood 54). One chapter of *Tambora* contains a remarkable discussion of the Ulster novelist William Carleton, whose novel *The Black Prophet* (1848) was published during the Great Famine but set in the context of an earlier period of prolonged hunger, the "forgotten famine" of 1816-1818. Carleton was a boy during the Tambora years and would have witnessed the extreme weather systems that afflicted Ireland's Atlantic coast in the aftermath of the Indonesian eruption. Severe cold, wet and stormy weather and humid conditions destroyed crops and led to unusually dark skies, the latter characterized by Carleton in terms of "the black drapery of the grave" (Wood 195).

With its discussion of authors such as Carleton and John Gamble, *Tambora* suggests just how much an environmentally-minded approach to nineteenth-century Irish narratives might achieve. The acres of unreclaimed bogland described in Maria Edgeworth's novels and her close interest in the realities of a subsistence economy built around turf would repay reading in this light, while the flooded fields that open the narrative of Anthony Trollope's *The Landleaguers* (1883) suggest an ecological drama at the heart of Trollope's final Irish novel. In Somerville and Ross's *The Real Charlotte* (1894), we are reminded of the close and uneasy proximity of human and non-human worlds when a giant mailboat docks in Dun Laoghaire and dominates the harbour with "the sentient ease of a living thing" (287). The young W. B. Yeats was an avid reader of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace, and recalls in *Autobiographies* that his "favourite book" as a boy was "a small green-covered book given to my father by a Dublin man of science; it gave an account of the strange sea creatures the man of science had discovered among the rocks at Howth or dredged out of Dublin Bay" (59).

In each of these examples, there are crucial questions of narrative at stake. The writings of contemporary Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh on the ability of literary narratives to cope with climate change can develop these issues. Ghosh's book *The Great Derangement* investigates "the grid of literary forms and conventions that came to shape the narrative imagination in precisely that period when the accumulation of carbon in the atmosphere was rewriting the history of the earth" (7). Disappointed by the inability of literary fiction to tackle climate change, Ghosh locates an "imaginative and cultural failure that lies at the heart of the current climate crisis" (8). He suggests that we are more likely to find serious engagement with our changing environment in what he calls the "generic outhouses" of fantasy, melodrama, Gothic, horror and science fiction than we are from within the house of serious fiction itself. Ghosh is interested in those forms that took shape at the outset of the great derangement – in particular the realist novel and the lyric poem – and discusses what such forms can and cannot achieve in the face of climate change. If we revisit nineteenth-century Irish writers with these observations in mind, it may be that the particular forms adopted by writers such as William Carleton and Maria Edgeworth represent not a falling away from metropolitan norms but rather modes that cleave to the world that they represent.

In January of 1816, a letter from Edgeworth to her aunt records that she has received a copy of the newly published novel *Emma* as a gift from its author, Jane Austen. Edgeworth was not reading Austen, however. Instead, the book that was absorbing everyone's attention in Edgeworthstown in early 1816 ("a book which delights us all", she wrote) was on the topic of environmental change (Maria Edgeworth to Mrs. Ruxton, 10 Jan. 1816; 1: 235). The book was *Theory of the Earth* by naturalist George Cuvier, first published in English in 1813. In it, Cuvier set out a theory of extinction, based on evidence for the occurrence of natural catastrophes across deep time. Edgeworth had purchased the book on a friend's recommendation and found it to be "admirably written, with such perfect clearness as to be intelligible to the meanest, and satisfactory to the highest capacity." (1: 235) Cuvier developed the science of palaeontology in Paris via the comparative study of fossils. Edgeworth's contemporary Lady Morgan and her husband visited him when they arrived in the French capital in 1818 and such was his influence in Ireland that a group of Cuvier's admirers in Munster established the Cuverian Society in Cork in 1835. His argument for successive waves of extinction

lost out to Darwinist thinking in the nineteenth century but the theory of a world subject to periodic cataclysmic events has found new favour in the era of the anthropocene (see Kolbert).

Maria Edgeworth's novels imagine a stratified, colonial society via an unstable, ruptured drama of improvement. Her novels realize that drama in ways that specifically concern a deep history of land and territory. In her *Letter to the Reviewers of Italy* (1821), Lady Morgan describes Ireland as "a land stamped with the impress of six centuries of degradation" (4) and in the novels we find details of that "impress" on fields, woodlands, wetlands and coasts. In *The O'Briens and the O'Flaherties* (1827), Lady Morgan breaks with the generational proprieties of realism to tell of the history of changing land use over centuries and not merely generations.

In the case of Lady Morgan, her narratives also self-consciously partake of a process whereby new territories are prospected for Anglophone fiction. Her novel *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) offers one of the very earliest accounts of the western province of Connemara: "the boldest and most romantic sea coast I ever beheld", remarks the narrator (35). In the period before the Great Famine, certain places came to be associated with an idea of Romantic Ireland. These places served as emblems not only of the romance of locality, but also to distill certain qualities that came to be associated with Ireland: remoteness, beauty, memory, history. The tourist discovery of the lakes surrounding Killarney in County Kerry in the early eighteenth-century has been described as "one of the founding moments of European Romanticism" (Gibbons 25). Along with Killarney in the south-west, the Giant's Causeway in the north-east was also known to travellers, while in the early nineteenth century, the round tower at Glendalough and the Powerscourt waterfall in Wicklow, south of Dublin, became accessible via the new post-Union road system.

The inscription of Irish places within Romantic aesthetics is shaped by this relationship between centrality and remoteness, while an uneven narrative of connection and disconnection characterises the history of landscape and coastlines. In the case of Ireland's south west coast, we encounter an area at once known and unknown. From one point of view, the south west was, like other parts of Ireland, in the process of being opened up via new roads in early nineteenth century. From a coastal perspective, however, it was already a place densely connected to the wider world by burgeoning imperial sea routes. As Barry Crosbie puts in, from around 1800 Ireland "was moving towards a gradual transformation in terms of its wider role and responsibilities within the Empire, from colonial outpost for much of the eighteenth century to sub-imperial centre by the beginning of the nineteenth." (62).

A Short History of the South West of Ireland

From the middle of the sixteenth century, Ireland's south west coast was caught up in English expansionist ambitions: "England was now a maritime power in the making and the southern Irish coast lay along the path to those ambitions" (Dickson xii). Improvers associated the region with "untapped riches", leading to its early plantation. The language of improvement is rich in the vocabulary of plenty: fair harbours, abundant fish and flowing rivers, all as observed and recorded and ever ready for exploitation – this language recurs right through the Famine and beyond (Dickson xii). That same coastline was to seem more remote in the era of road travel, and especially in the post-Napoleonic war period, when Britain's land-based power radiated outward from Dublin with an uncertain reach into such distant locations as west Cork.

In his *Natural History of Ireland* (1652), Gerard Boate considers the "shape" and "figure" of the island of Ireland (3). Boate's interest in specifying the details of Ireland's topography was economic: written and published in the immediate aftermath of the Cromwellian conquest, his book constituted "a detailed prospectus for would-be planters and investors" (Greengrass, Leslie, and Raylor 23). Its observations were inseparable from a wider colonial project of conquest and colonization that saw "about 40 per cent of Ireland" become the property of "fresh Protestant owners" (Barnard 281). The scientific language of improvement underpinned a process whereby Catholic claims to land were assigned to history. Discussing Boate's prose, Patricia Coughlan has noted how protocols of Baconian empiricism foundered in the Irish context, "perverted by self-serving acquisitiveness, oppressive intolerance and revulsion at ethnic Otherness" (300). Drawing on Adorno, Coughlan further argues that Boate's prose allows for a reading of nature and history in terms of a critical relationship to one another. In resisting a tendency to imagine nature as the mute and timeless opposite of history, Boate's language opens up an account of the history of Irish nature (Coughlan 314-315).

Having discussed "The Situation of Ireland" and the "Distance betwixt Ireland and several places upon the coast of Great-Britain", Boate's *History* moves to the topic of the "Shape and Bigness of Ireland". His language evokes a potentially uniform island unit, deformed by the operations of the sea:

> The shape of this island is longways square, but not fully for to say nothing of several corners and forelands, which run out a great way into the sea, nor of divers great bays and inlets, which the sea maketh here and there, in the three other parts of this island, the fourth part, called Munster, doth greatly alter that figure; for in lieu of stretching it self first from the north to the south, and then from the south to the west, it runneth altogether sloping from the north east to the south west; and there besides it stretchest it self much further into the sea with its western shores, than any other part of Ireland on the same west side (3).

In imagining the island as a relatively regular rectangle, negatively affected by the role of forelands, bays and inlets, Boate draws attention to the role of Ireland's coastline in the discourse of improvement. His account describes a piece of land that runs from the north-east to south-west, as if following the pull of the Atlantic and the sweep of the sea. From this curious suggestion that Ireland's southwestern corner breaks what might have been the square mould of Ireland's shape, we can begin to understand some of the particular meanings of coastline in the language of improvement.

Boate's sense that the shape of the south west does not mesh well with the discourse of improvement is echoed in a later study by another improver, Horatio Townsend. Townsend's *Statistical Survey of Cork* (1808) concerns itself also with coastline in the context of an improvement discourse keen to assert that even the most forbidding parts of the coastline can afford food and protection. Asserting that rough rocks can hide sheltered havens, Townsend imagines the contradictory nature of the Cork coastline in terms of a providential arrangement:

> Ever provident to the wants of man, nature compensates in one way what she denies in another. In the south and south-west parts, where the rocky inequality of the ground renders artificial navigation impracticable, the sea, and its numerous indentures, give abundant facility of water carriage (31-32).

Once more, there is something in the coastline that disrupts the narrative of plenty and potential:

> Be the cause what it may, the south-west quarter is almost entirely composed of immense masses of rock standing as barriers against the proud waves of the Atlantic, which for the greater part of the year are dashed against its shores by the force of the prevailing winds. A bulwark of inferior durability might indeed suffice for the safety of the coast, but such is the depth and turbulence of that vast ocean, that none, who have seen it raging, will be disposed to complain of a superabundant protection (20).

The coastline affords more than what merely suffices; its protection is "superabundant". Even as the idea of the south west as a place of untapped riches and unexploited plenty continues into the nineteenth century, so too do these contradictions of persistence, irregularity and excess.

If we think of natural history as "the uneasy neighbor of political economy" as Fredrik Albritton Jonsson puts it (6), then the troubled imbrication of Irish coastal landscapes with the ideology of empire becomes clearer. Natural history expresses what Albritton Jonsson calls "the interconnected tasks of inventory and exploitation" (48). The relationship between science, commerce and empire continues from the early modern period through to Ireland under the Union. Improving projects such as Boate's *Natural History* can be connected to later organisations such as The Dublin Philosophical Society, the Royal Dublin Society, the Physico-Historical Society and the Royal Irish Academy, and the Ordnance Survey (Barnard 281, 285). John O'Donovan in his letters from Cork has high hopes for a county he describes as being "particularly *Irish* especially in the mountains and along the coasts" (letter to Capt James R. E. July 26, 1842, *Ordnance Survey*). Elsewhere in the Ordnance Survey correspondence for Cork however we find a note about "[t]he first monument erected to the memory of Nelson after the Battle of Trafalgar" at Castletownsend: a reminder that this is coastline closely involved in empire and that the Survey itself "by the late 1840s" constituted "a state science project of immense size, without parallel anywhere in the world" (Joyce 44-45).

Estuarine Affordances

Amidst these contradictions we can locate the life and writings of James Clarence Mangan, whose poem "Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey at Teach Molaga" concerns the remaining sections of this essay. A key figure in the history of Irish Romantic poetry, Mangan was admired by both Yeats and Joyce and his writings continue to draw the interests of contemporary critics and writers alike (see Sturgeon). Mangan's father was a hedge schoolmaster while his mother ran a grocery at 3 Fishamble Street, Dublin. Mangan was educated in Jesuit schools and, at age 15, apprenticed to a scrivener as family fortunes declined. He remained a legal scrivener until 1838, when he was appointed to the Ordnance Survey. In the 1830s, he came to know such scholars and antiquarians as John O'Donovan (the original for the character of Owen in Brian Friel's play *Translations*), George Petrie and Owen Connellan "who were to inspire his interest in Irish language material and supply him with raw translations to versify" (Ryder 3). As an employee of the Survey, Mangan was immersed in a Gaelic world that was both past and present: "evidence of its remnants came to his desk every day in the Ordnance Survey Office" (Welch, *Irish Poetry* 99).

The Ordnance Survey office was founded in the Phoenix Park in Dublin in 1824, its objective to create a series of linked county maps of the island of Ireland, on the scale of six inches to one mile. Brian Friel's play *Translations* (1980) has created a popular understanding of the survey's topographical work as a project that forced linguistic change by destroying the delicate fabric of intimate and customary relationships with place.[2] In its practical operations, however, and in particular in the fieldwork conducted by John O'Donovan and colleagues, the Survey can be seen to expresses "a sensibility that seeks out and respects indigenous forms of knowledge, Irish history, the Irish language, and the built heritage" (Parsons 69). It is within this contested context that Mangan came to know Cork and Ireland's south west coast, with the result that his experience partakes of a particular combination of distance and intimacy. While "John O'Donovan was tramping the roads of Ireland [...] collecting and annotating all kinds of topographical and antiquarian lore" (Welch, *A History* 102), Mangan was engaged in clerical work, based at the home of George Petrie in Great Charles Street, Dublin. As the office of the Ordnance Survey was being wound up in 1841 and 1842, Mangan was copying down information about Cork. A letter from Larcom to Petrie asks if Mangan is "copying the descriptive remarks from the Cork townlands of that county" and refers to the "pressing" need for "the copying of the inquis. for Cork". Petrie wrote to Larcom on the 25th November 1842 to say that "*Mr Mangan* is copying passages" relating to Cork from the *Pactata Hibernia*. Other letters suggest that Mangan was at work copying the Down Survey for Cork, an activity that would have brought him into close proximity to the post-Cromwellian transformation of the Irish landscape (Shannon-Mangan 247-49). Such labours meant that "the facts and obscuri-

2 Friel in turn draws on the popular nationalist historian Alice Stopford Green who imagines the Ordnance Survey as "a deliberate act of cultural warfare" (Andrews 174).

ties of Irish history gained immediacy and imaginative reality" for Mangan (Welch, *A History* 103).

Mangan not only imparts "imaginative reality" to the west Cork coastline however but also "was engaged in a long-running critical dialogue with the modes of access [...] that the Survey explored" (Parsons 83), as evident in his poem "Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey at Teach Molaga". First published in *The Nation* on the 8th August 1846, this lyric poem in twenty quantrains gives dramatic voice to an unnamed figure who wanders at the edge of an estuary, at the head of which sits the ruined abbey of Timoleague (or Teach Molaga). The poem's topography enompasses a drowned river valley, where the Argideen River discharges into the Courtmacsherry estuary on its way to the sea. The estuary is currently designated a Special Area of Conservation because of its distinctive mudflats, sandy and shingle beaches, reedbeds and tideline vegetation. The abbey's remains are marked on the orginal six inch Ordnance Survey map for Cork: "Timoleague Abbey. In Ruins". On this map, the remains of the Abbey can be seen to overlook the point where the slow moving Argideen is enclosed by sea and sand, before it discharges into the Atlantic. In the poem, the speaker's estuarine location ("I wandered forth at night alone, / Along the dreary, shingly, billow-beaten shore") serves at once to enclose a subjective experience of loss while opening the narrative up to the "strange and chaotic temporalities" of anthropegenic change (Pinkus 3).

The first nineteen stanzas are translations of an earlier Irish language poem by Sean O'Coilean of Myross in County Cork; the final, twentieth, stanza is Mangan's own addition. The title of the original poem, "Machtnamh an Duine Dhoilgheasaig, nó Caoineadh Thighe Molaga", translates as "Musings of a Lonely Person, or Lament for Timoleague".[3] The poem opens with an Irish language epigraph ('*Oidche dhámh go doilg, dúbhach*') that is unstranslated but closely echoed in the opening line: "I wandered forth at night alone". As the speaker goes on to imagine a former clerical community as an emblem of organic wholeness and former plenty, the poem voices a powerful address to a lost past. In imagining this vanished world, however, Mangan also captures the capacities of the poem's contemporary location in vivid and evocative ways. The loneliness and isolation of Mangan's lyric 'I' is intimately shaped by the "dreary, shingly, billow-beaten shore" (l. 2) along which he wanders. The early use of the poetic word "billow" immediately suggests an atmosphere. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines billow as "The swell on the ocean produced by the wind, or on a river or estuary by the tide" and examples of usage relate to the sixteenth century and the early modern moment of empire (Richard Hakluyt and Walter Raleigh). We find a similar usage of this archaism in Jeremiah Joseph Callanan's literary notebooks from the 1820s, in which a draft note for a West Cork poem reads: "the billows are humming their slogan of war" (129).

3 A translation of the poem into English by Thomas Furlong appeared in James Hardiman's *Irish Minstrelsy* in 1831 while two further translation were undertaken by Samuel Ferguson and published in the *Dublin University Magazine*, October and November 1834.

O'Coilean's original is sometimes thought of as a pastiche of an English Romantic poem rather than as a piece of writing that can be properly connected to Munster's rich poetic traditions. Mangan's *Lament* arguably revives a poem that was not in the first place deeply rooted in Gaelic tradition, but rather one that owes debts to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and a synthetic Romantic sensibility.[4] Mangan himself has been understood to be unconcerned with "natural things" and read as an urban and introspective poet who cannot reconnect the ruins of a broken sensibility with the healing qualities of the natural world (Welch, *Irish Poetry* 77, 80; Lloyd 92). His writing is however notably concerned with climate and with weather: states of cold and heat register layers of history in intimate ways in a number of his best poems, resulting in what Matthew Campbell describes as "an invented prosody of frozen numbness, a sort of zombie metre" (120).

In "Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey at Teach Molaga", a cloudy night sky and the doleful sounds of wind and sea frame a changing historical canvas. The poem looks backwards to the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland and the destruction of monasteries and abbeys, in this case the Franciscan friary at Teach Molaga / Timoleague. In doing so, it conjures up an early modern Munster in which vagrancy was commonplace: Dickson notes "the disproportionately high numbers of wandering Irish poor with a south Munster background" and "a strikingly direct association between the presence of the New English and the dislocation of the indigenous population" (27). The Irish language original of the poem was written in 1816, at the end of the Napoleonic wars and the outset of a period of bleakly cold weather that affected the Atlantic seaboard in the aftermath of the Tambora eruption: farmers in Cork and Kerry "witnessed the full gamut of rain damaged crops, including waking to find their corn crop covered in red volcanic dust" (Wood 180). Famines in 1817 and 1822 characterized these years of economic recession and food scarcity and were followed by the Rockite rebellion that convulsed the South of Ireland in the 1820s. Mangan's own translation and adaptation of the poem was undertaken during the catastrophic Famine years.

The identity of the particular place inscribed within the poem is verified via a footnote attached to the poem's title. This note not only translates what might be an unfamiliar Irish place name but also refers readers to the wider process whereby the Irish landscape was made legible in the English langauge: "Literally 'The House of (St.) Molaga', and now called Timoleague. Our readers will find its position on the Map of Munster". David Lloyd's account of the many ironies involved in this note is worth quoting at length:

4 Parsons suggests a connection to William Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm, Painted by George Beaumont" (104), a poem written by Wordsworth after the death by drowning of his brother, a sea-captain. The first line of "Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey at Teach Molaga" ("I wandered forth at night alone") might also be compared to the first line of Wordsworth's "Daffodils" ("I wandered lonely as a cloud"). Both opening lines express loss and loneliness in iambic tetrameter, but are quite different in tone.

> At this point Mangan's ironic play becomes particularly intricate. Where the other translators of the poem had simply adopted the anglicized form of the name, Mangan here reverts to the Gaelic name, only to find himself obliged to retranslate it. Since the place-name is metonymically derived from that of the abbey itself, the full title of Mangan's poem becomes implicitly absurd, given that it only makes sense so long as the anglicized transliteration disguises the meaning that full translation foregrounds. Similar gestures are found throughout the ballads of the *Nation*, with the difference that the nationalist balladeers tend to be content merely to revert to a superficial rewriting of the anglicized name in Gaelic orthography. Retained or restored in this form, the Gaelic name becomes a picturesque index of Irishness, appearing to localize and reroot an English writing while actually seeking to master the otherness of Gaelic speech and culture and assimilate it to an English literary culture (Lloyd 92-93).

For Lloyd, the linguistic and topographical intricacies of the footnote serve to undermine any straightforward cultural claims for authenticity that might be assumed via the poem's publication in *The Nation* newspaper.

Just as the footnote suggests an opening up of provisionally placed forms of knowledge, however, so the instabilities and ironies sound within Mangan's poetry in different registers, related to topographical as well as political forms of uncertainty. In the context of his discussion, Lloyd describes the Ordnance Survey as "a map produced by the British military establishment" (93-94), a phrase to which contemporary poet and critic David Wheatley takes exception. To follow David Lloyd's account, he says, is "to succumb to the Romantic tale of enforced Anglicization repeated by Brian Friel's play, *Translations* (1980)" (Sturgeon 39). While the Ordnance Survey continues to generate debate in Irish Studies (see Parsons), it is odd to note that Lloyd goes on to remark of the poem's location that "[i]t is consequently merely one more twist to this irony that, contrary to what the various versions imply, the map will show that Timoleague is not on the edge of the sea" (94). Cóilín Parsons also queries the placing of Mangan's poem and argues that its imagined topography confuses literary and real geographies: "Whereas Timoleague's actual setting is closer to that of Tintern Abbey – the bend of a tranquil estuary – Mangan places it on the edge of the roaring Atlantic" (105).

As discussed above, the area referred to within the poem is an estuary that opens onto the Atlantic, a marine environment comprised both of river and sea. The reference to "the dreary, shingly, billow-beaten shore" in the first stanza of the poem signifies this estuarine location, which is also suggested in the Irish original of the poem where the silence and lack of noise of sea or wind are mentioned. In stanzas thirteen and seventeen, the ocean is aligned with "Brutal England's power". The association of the Atlantic with empire and danger is familiar from Jeremiah Joseph Callanan's 1820s elegy, "The Lay of Mizen Head", a poem that remembers the death by drowning of a young Irish midshipman on a wrecked British warship "about a mile west of Mizen Head", on the west Cork coast.

In the thirteenth stanza in particular, sea, sands and history combine as active agents of change:

> Tempest and Time— the drifting sands—
> The lightnings and the rains— the seas that sweep around

> These hills in winter-nights, have awfully crowned
> The work of impious hands!

The poem's invocation of "a continuing process of degradation" (Lloyd 91) can be understood in specifically environmental as well as more generally political terms. The silting up of this and other estuaries along the west Cork coast is noted by Charles Smith in his 1750 *History of Cork*: "This harbour was formerly navigable, but is now quite obstructed with sand, so that only small sloops and boats can come to Timoleague, and smaller sand vessels about a mile above it" (Smith 2: 242). Most nineteenth-century travellers follow Smith in describing Timoleague as "formerly a place of some note" (Smith 2: 244; Hansbrow 397). Although by the 1830s it was a penny-post town with a constabulary station and a medical dispensary, Timoleague's most notable features remain its ruined abbey and silted up estuary. Pastness inheres not only in the abbey burned by Cromwell's soldiers but in the estuary itself, whose "dreary" shore and "drifting sands" supply a resonant language of change and loss.

Observing that the estuary on which the village is located is two miles from the mouth of the sea, located "on an arm of the ocean", Smith's topographical description, the river "glides" in sinuous and intimate relationship to the building that it "washes" along a semi-circular coastline (Smith 2: 242, 243). Clear distinctions between silence and sound or river and sea do not fully hold for the mixed marine environment imagined by Mangan. The drifting, sweeping, gliding and washing of a poetic body of water that is comprised of both river and sea can cause critics of the poem to lose their bearings. In Fiona Stafford's vivid account, estuaries capture "the essential uncertainty of the river-mouth, which is at once an end and a beginning" (3). The etymology

> is derived from the latin, *aestuarium*, meaning heat, boiling, bubbling – and it has two distinct definitions. The first is "a tidal opening" or, as ever, "an arm of the sea indenting the land," and the second, "the tidal mouth of a great river." So is an estuary an inlet or an outlet? A Mouth or an arm? (Stafford 3)

In writing about "[t]he sense of an estuary as a kind of no man's land or a place of disputed power, where uncontrollable forces clash" (3), Stafford helps us to understand the ways in which estuaries afford topographical, cultural and bodily forms of uncertainty.

The ability of Mangan's poem to register the ambivalences of former abundance and present constraint draws on these affordances of estuaries as ending and beginning, opening and enclosure, mouth and arm. The poem's eleventh and twelfth stanzas imagine change via the lens of the natural world, as blown and unkempt flora merge with the built environment and state and human and non-human worlds combine:

> Alas! alas! how dark the change!
> Nor round its mouldering walls, over its pillars low,
> The grass grows rank, the yellow gowans blow,
> Looking so sad and strange!
>
> Unsightly stones choke up its wells;
> The owl hoots all night long under the altar-stairs;

The fox and badger make their darksome lairs
In its deserted cells!

The abbreviated lines that conclude each stanza alongside the repeated exclamation marks seem to enact a break with the familiar forms of consolation afforded by Romantic lyric. As the natural world darkens, the poem simultaneously registers the richness of a lost community and its susceptibility to violence. Rather than read Mangan as a poet who "trades in evanescence" or approach "Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey at Teach Molaga" as an "archive of disappearances" (Parsons 108), we might consider the ways in which the vision of a lost imagined community lives on, albeit within an imperilled natural world. Abandoned "altar-stairs" become "darksome lairs" for animals, while "whitening bones half sunk / In the earth" bear witness to the lives of "monk, / Friar, acolyte or priest".

Writing about reading Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) in the era of Donald Trump, the American critic Jedediah Purdy remarks that "Nature and landscape are palimpsests of history and social violence more than they are alternatives to them. They show back to the observer the durability and definiteness of the world people have made so far, as well as its fragility" (n. pag.). The critical relationship between nature and history we can discern in accounts of Irish landscape from the early modern period onwards might be seen as replicated in the unstable and invasive connection between land and sea in Mangan's poem. When the poem ends on "the roaring of the wave", it is as a "dirge" sounding in the ear of the poet:

I turned away, as toward my grave,
And, all my dark way homeward by the Atlantic's verge,
Resounded in mine ears like to a dirge
The roaring of the wave.

Death emerges in the specific context of the coastline with its resonant sonic effects, while the strange and uncertain rhyming of "verge" and "dirge", as with "grave" and "wave", helps us to hear some of the ways in which this poem puts in place a set of relationships between estuaries, pastness and the stylised elaboration of emotional intensity in a lyric mode. In "Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth writes of change in terms of a loss which is followed by "abundant recompense". In putting a dark journey along the edge of a noisy estuary in the place of such "recompense", Mangan's poem imagines a natural world that offers neither respite nor wreckage but rather the fragile possibility of reflection shaped by the violent and mournful sounds of the sea.

Telling Environmental Stories

Ireland's role in that original Faustian pact with carbon is hardly a central one, but environmental sacrifice zones persist. Risteard O'Domhnaill's film documentary *The Pipe* (2010) speaks on behalf of one such sacrificial community, addressing as it does Shell's exploitation of the natural gas off the coast of Mayo. More recently the practice of fracking and the imperiled aquifers of Counties Cavan and Fermanagh concern

Paula Meehan in her 2016 final lecture as Ireland Professor of Poetry. In a lecture entitled "Planet Water", Meehan recites her poem "Well" as "a spell against the frackers" (75). With "water on the brain", Meehan imagines that "the lull of tides is mine for the hearing" (75). Perhaps the idea of a poetic gesture designed to protect the water table, attuned to the distant sounds of the sea, is not so distant from Mangan's questioning, insistent, estuarine "I"?

Meehan shares with Amitav Ghosh a specific interest in ways of telling and a suspicion of the aesthetic injunction to show rather than tell – the preference for striking images over conceptual formulations or long involved stories. Like Ghosh, she invokes this exact mantra of creative writing classes — "show me, don't tell me"— and queries its usefulness for events on a scale that seem to call for the abstractions found in epic, myth or legend (Meehan 7). To borrow Meehan's terms, "Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey at Teach Molaga" may be lacking in "striking images" but it is rich in "abstract nouns": across its twenty stanzas, the poem invokes "Life, and Death and Fate", "Piety and Peace: Virtue and Truth", "Work and Will", "Age", "Tempest and Time", "Wrong", "Justice" and "Change". Of these, "Change" seems most resonant word of all, suggesting the power of language to express highly specific forms of loss even as it bends to powerful external circumstances:

Alas, I rave! ... If Change is here,
Is it not o'er the land? — Is it not too in me?
Yes! I am changed even more than what I see.
Now is my last goal near.

Using strikingly similar language to both Ghosh and Meehan, the science fiction novelist Ursula Le Guin praises John Galt's *Annals of the Parish* (1821) as a "nineteenth-century Scottish novel that blissfully tells without showing" (Le Guin). Galt's novel with its quirky first person narrator is indebted to Edgeworth and like many Irish novels of the same period narrates change across centuries rather than adhering to the generational proprieties of realism. Every word in Galt, Le Guin says "tells" of the weight and plodding circumstance of everyday life and the complexity of existence on our planet. This repeated reverse injunction, to tell rather than show, returns us to a body of nineteenth-century Irish writing as a rich and sustainable resource and reminds us that we can read it anew from our location in the anthropocene.

Alongside novels and poems, we might also revisit the earliest natural histories of the British Isles: books such as Boate's, produced in a period before the division of academic disciplines and long tainted by their association with land confiscations and colonialism. Such sources, largely ignored by modern scientific research, are not neutral repositories of information but rather studies that emerged from scholarship shaped by colonialism and revolution; underpinned by the ideology of improvement and the realities of an extractive colonial economy. The location of such wide-ranging multi-disciplinary approaches at the very threshold of political change and amidst a scramble for resource extraction proves a vital lead in a reimagining of nineteenth-century Irish narratives at the frontiers of postcolonial and environmental history.

Works Cited

Andrews, J. H. *A Paper Landscape: The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975.

Barnard, T. C. "The Hartlib Circle and the Cult and Culture of Improvement in Ireland." *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation: Studies in Intellectual Communication*. Ed. Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie, and Timothy Raylor. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. 281-97.

Boate, Gerard. *The Natural History of Ireland*. London, 1652. 30 May 2017. <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E650002-001/>.

Callanan, Jeremiah Joseph. *Literary Remains of Jeremiah Callanan, Collected and Compiled by John Fitzpatrick Fitzthomas Windele of Blair's Castle, Cork*. 1847. Manuscript.

Campbell, Matthew. *Irish Poetry under the Union, 1801-1924*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013.

Carpenter, Andrew, and Lucy Collins. "Introduction: The Irish Poet and the Natural World 1581-1819." *The Irish Poet and the Natural World: An Anthology of Verse in English from the Tudors to the Romantics*. Ed. Andrew Carpenter and Lucy Collins. Cork: Cork UP, 1997. 1-48.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (2009): 197-222.

Coughlan, Patricia. "Natural History and Historical Nature: The Project for a Natural History of Ireland." *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation: Studies in Intellectual Communication*. Ed. Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie, and Timothy Raylor. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. 298-318.

Crosbie, Barry. *Irish Imperial Networks: Migration, Social Communication and Exchange in Nineteenth-Century India*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012.

Dickson, David. *Old World Colony: Cork and South Munster, 1630-1830*. Cork: Cork UP, 2005.

Edgeworth, Maria. *Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*. Ed. Augustus J. C. Hare. 2 vols. London, 1894.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2016.

Gibbons, Luke. "Topographies of Terror: Killarney and the Politics of the Sublime." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 95.1 (1996): 23-44.

Gidal, Eric. *Ossianic Unconformities: Bardic Poetry in the Industrial Age*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2015.

Greengrass, Mark, Michael Leslie, and Timothy Raylor. "Introduction." *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation: Studies in Intellectual Communication*. Ed. M. Greengrass, M. Leslie, and T. Raylor. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. 1-25.

Hansbrow, G. *An Improved Topographical and Historical Hibernian Gazetteer*. Dublin: R. M. Tims, 1835.

Jonsson, Fredrik Albritton. *Enlightenment's Frontier: The Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Environmentalism*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2013.

Joyce, Patrick. *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State Since 1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013.

Klein, Naomi. "Let Them Drown: The Violence of Othering in a Warming World." *London Review of Books* 38.11 (2016): 11-14. 30 May 2017. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n11/naomi-klein/let-them-drown>.

Kolbert, Elizabeth. "The Lost World: The Mastodon's Molars." *New Yorker*, 16 December 2013. 30 May 2017. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/12/16/the-lost-world-2>.

Le Guin, Ursula K. "B-Sides: John Galt's 'Annals of the Parish'." *Public Books*, 23 January 2017. 30 May 2017. <http://www.publicbooks.org/b-sides-john-galts-annals-parish/>.

Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015.

Lloyd, David. *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1987.

Mangan, James Clarence. "Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey of Teach Molaga." *James Clarence Mangan: Selected Writings*. Ed. Sean Ryder. Dublin: UCD Press, 2004. 231-34.

Meehan, Paula. "Planet Water." *Imaginary Bonnets with Real Bees in Them*. Dublin: UCD Press, 2016. 55-79.

Morgan, Lady (Sydney Owenson). *Letter to the Reviewers of 'Italy'*. Paris: Galignani, 1821.

—. *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale*. Ed. Claire Connolly and Stephen Copley. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000.

Ordnance Survey of Ireland: Cork Memoranda. [Typed copy of notes, queries, correspondence etc. written by O'Donovan, Larcom and others relative to the antiquities of Co. Cork, 1842-1845.] Manuscript.

Outram, Dorinda. "The History of Natural History: Grand Narrative or Local Lore?" *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History*. Ed. John Wilson Foster. Dublin: Lilliput, 1997. 461-71.

Parsons, Cóilín. *The Ordnance Survey and Modern Irish Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016.

Pinkus, Karen. "Climate Change Criticism." *Diacritics* 41.3 (2013): 3-4.

Purdy, Jedediah. "What I had Lost was a Country." *n+1 Magazine*, 20 December 2016. 30 May 2017. <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/what-i-had-lost-was-a-country/>.

Ryder, Sean. "Introduction." *James Clarence Mangan: Selected Writings*. Ed. S. Ryder. Dublin: UCD Press, 2004. 25 July 2017. <https://aran.library.nuigalway.ie/handle/10379/4741>.

Shannon-Mangan, Ellen. *James Clarence Mangan: A Biography*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996.

Smith, Charles. *The Ancient and Present State of the City and County of Cork*. 2 vols. Cork, 1815.

Somerville, Edith O., and Martin Ross. *The Real Charlotte*. London, 1894.

Stafford, Fiona. "Writing around the Irish Sea: Inlets, Outlets, Firths and Mouths." *UCDscholarcast* 31. *Series 7: The Literatures and Cultures of the Irish Sea*. Ed. John Brannigan. UCD 2013. 30 May 2017. <www.ucd.ie/scholarcast/transcripts/Scholarcast31_transcript.pdf>.

Sturgeon, Sinead, ed. *Essays on James Clarence Mangan: The Man in the Cloak*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014.

Townsend, Horatio. *Statistical Survey of the County of Cork, with Observations on the Means of Improvement; Drawn up for the Consideration, and by Direction of the Dublin Society*. Dublin: Graisberry and Campbell, 1810.

Welch, Robert. *A History of Verse Translation from the Irish, 1789-1897*. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988.

—. *Irish Poetry from Moore to Yeats*. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1980.

Wood, Gillen D'Arcy. *Tambora: The Eruption that Changed the Modern World*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015.

Wright, Julia M. *Representing the National Landscape in Irish Romanticism*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2014.

Yeats, W. B. *Autobiographies*. Ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald. Vol. 3 of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*. New York: Scribner, 1990.

Seth T. Reno

Romantic Clouds: Narrating Climate Change

In his well-known lecture *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884), John Ruskin uses the cloud as a symbol of England's moral and intellectual decline as well as an actual manifestation of pollution and climate change. Ruskin first outlines the standard scientific definition of a cloud as "Visible vapour of water floating at a certain height in the air" before developing that description through literary and artistic imagery, personal observation, and affective experience (8). The purpose of clouds, he argues, is partly to satisfy "human sight and nourishment," "filling [our] hearts with food and gladness" (3). Indeed, the appearance of what Ruskin calls "plague-clouds" and "plague-winds" in the latter half of the nineteenth century corresponds both to a kind of "moral gloom" in England and to the rise of industrial pollution: the new cloud "looks partly as if it were made of poisonous smoke; very possibly it may be: there are at least two hundred furnace chimneys in a square of two miles on every side of me" (33). Nature itself thus shows "an expression of anger as well as of fear and distress" at the "radical change" in climate, a kind of "panic-struck, and feverish" mood that results in "Blanched sun, – blighted grass, – blinded man" (35, iv, 43). Ruskin offers examples of this mood from science, literature, and the paintings of J. M. W. Turner. Importantly, Ruskin concludes that we can address climate change through recovery of a Romantic love of nature: "harmony [with nature] is now broken, and broken the world round [.... Man's] only true happiness is to live in Hope of something to be won by him, in Reverence of something to be worshipped by him, and in Love of something to be cherished by him, and cherished – for ever" (96, 98-99). Reconciliation is not possible, but, as Ruskin suggests, there is hope that love and happiness may lead to social, political, personal, and spiritual change.

Ruskin's brand of ecological thinking can be traced back to Romantic poets and artists whose representations of clouds often register as modes for thinking about affect and climate change. In fact, Ruskin reads the narrative of climate change through the nineteenth century, both in atmospheric changes and in Romantic-era literature and art. The Romantic period, after all, witnessed the beginning of the Anthropocene (see Morton, *Hyperobjects* 164), and the rise of climate science, coupled with the visible effects of industrialization, allowed the Romantics to become what James McKusick calls "the first full-fledged ecological writers in the Western literary tradition" (19). Consider, for instance, the opening stanza of William Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807):

> I wandered lonely as a Cloud
> That floats on high o'er Vales and Hills,
> When all at once I saw a crowd
> A host of dancing Daffodils;